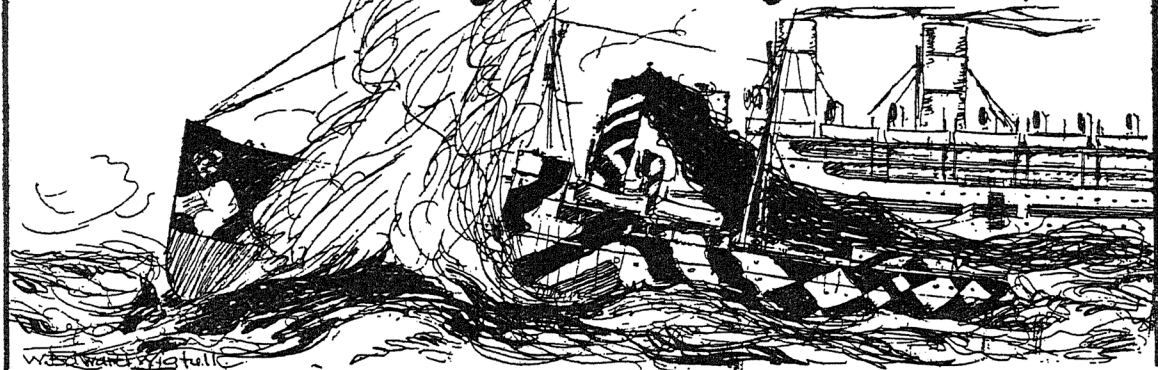


The Only Way

By
A.E. Urquhart.



JIM RODMAN, first mate of s.s. *Marlan*, was leaning over the bridge rail, looking as though life were a burden to him.

He was roused from his reverie by a tap on the shoulder. Glancing up, he saw the ruddy, boyish face of his junior.

"Hullo, 'Roddy!'" said the other cheerily; "what's up? Your face is as long as a Cape Horn passage."

"I'm worried, Tony—down in my luck—humped," and Rodman shrugged his shoulders.

"Sorry, old chap. Bad trouble?" said the younger man, his manner changing abruptly.

"No. But it may be. I haven't heard from Alec for nearly six weeks. The last letter was in a shaky hand, saying he was wounded and in hospital. If anything happens to him, it'll knock the bottom out of everything. You see there are only the two of us—and he's only a kid—and such a smart, nice kid too."

"But letters do go wrong. You'll find one from him at Liverpool," urged Tony cheerily.

"Hope so. But I ought to have got one at Bordeaux. And it isn't only that, Tony," Rodman went on, in gloomy tones. "You may, or may not, know that every penny of our money—Alec's and mine—is in the *Marlan*. We're part owners, in a small way, and Alec's start in life depends on the luck of the boat. And now what fool's game do you think our co-partners have played?" he asked fiercely.

Tony admitted that shipowners were

capable of any idiocy; but could not guess of what particular form of lunacy Rodman was the victim.

"They haven't insured against war risks. The *Marlan* is taking her chances; and if she's 'biffed,' down goes our little all—and not a penny compensation."

"Idiots! Idiots of the purest breed," was the opinion of the second mate. "But we're nearly through now. We shall get into port all right. Don't worry."

"I wish I could think so," sighed Jim. "The worst part is to come. Two boats were 'put down' yesterday. And look along the coast. Why, from Flamborough to Whitby you can see masts sticking up like pins in a pin-cushion. I shan't feel comfortable till we're snug in port."

The *Marlan* was homeward bound from the South of France, and had fallen in, about mid-Channel, with a convoy from the Mediterranean.

After much parleying with the destroyer escort as regarded speed and destination, she had been allowed to share the protection of the war vessels until she reached England.

The position allotted to her was the outside of the convoy, and on the port side of a great hospital ship. For the last eight hours the *Marlan* had been steaming along with her bows in line with the bridge of her big neighbour.

Jim had been careful to maintain the position, since he was proud of his little ship's turn of speed, and would not concede an inch, even to such a leviathan.

"Shows what beasts these Germans are,"